

TIDES

BY

JOHN DRINKWATER



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1917

Drunkwater

Medal



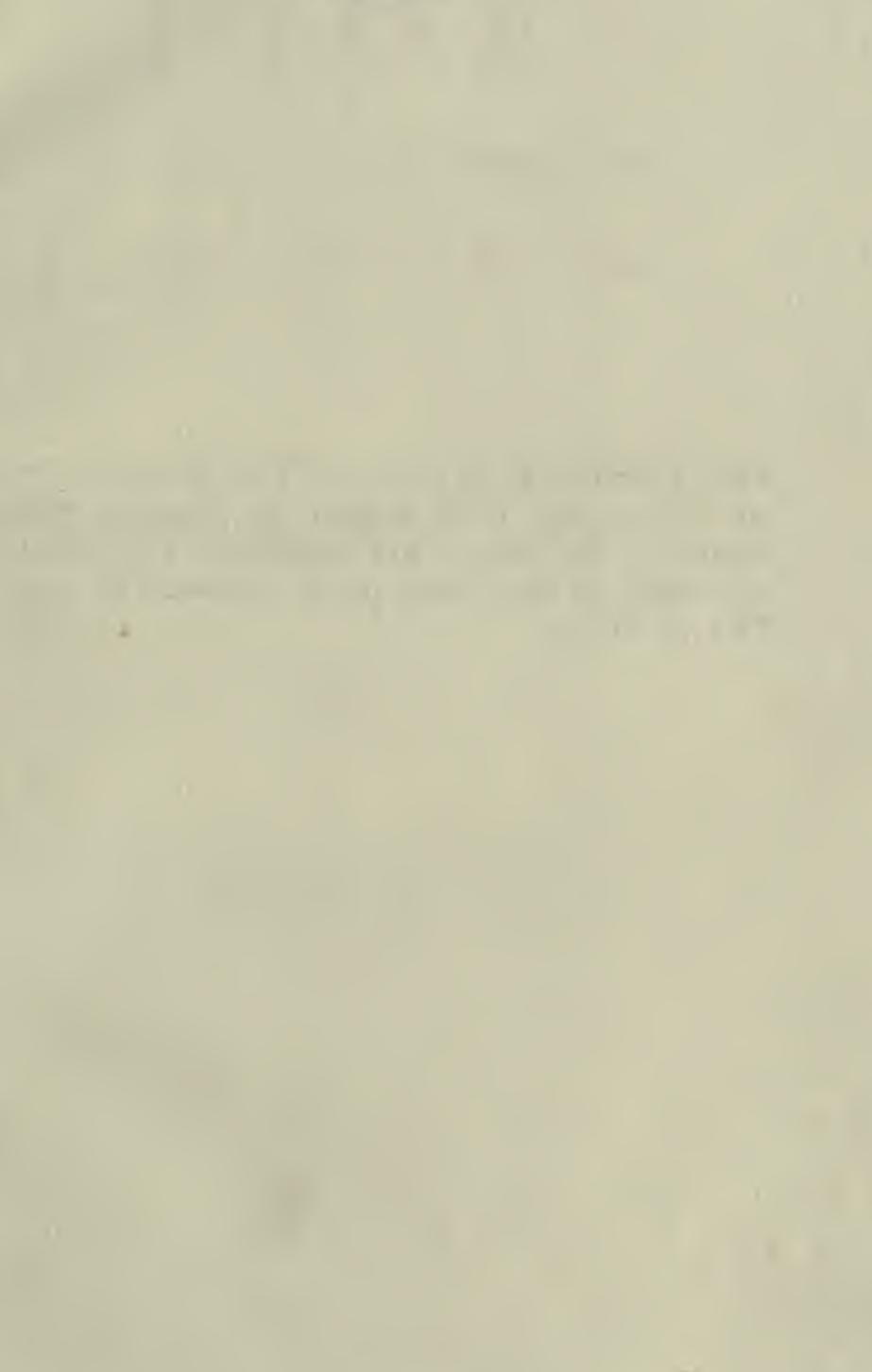




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# TIDES



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# TIDES

A BOOK OF POEMS BY

JOHN DRINKWATER



## DEDICATION

TO GENERAL SIR IAN HAMILTON

Because the darling chivalries,  
That light your battle-line, belong  
To music's heart no less than these,  
I bring you my campaigns of song.

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## A MAN'S DAUGHTER

**T**HERE is an old woman who looks each night  
Out of the wood.  
She has one tooth, that isn't too white.  
She isn't too good.

She came from the north looking for me,  
About my jewel.

Her son, she says, is tall as can be ;  
But, men say, cruel.

My girl went northward, holiday making,  
And a queer man spoke  
At the woodside once when night was breaking,  
And her heart broke.

For ever since she has pined and pined,  
A sorry maid ;  
Her fingers are slack as the wool they wind,  
Or her girdle-braid.

So now shall I send her north to wed,  
Who here may know  
Only the little house of the dead  
To ease her woe ?

Or keep her for fear of that old woman,  
As a bird quick-eyed,  
And her tall son who is hardly human,  
At the woodside ?

She is my babe and my daughter dear,  
How well, how well.

Her grief to me is a fourfold fear,  
Tongue cannot tell.

And yet I know that far in that wood  
Are crumbling bones,  
And a mumble mumble of nothing that's good,  
In heathen tones.

And I know that frail ghosts flutter and sigh  
In brambles there,  
And never a bird or beast to cry—  
Beware, beware,—

While threading the silent thickets go  
Mother and son,  
Where scrupulous berries never grow,  
And airs are none.

And her deep eyes peer at eventide  
Out of the wood,  
And her tall son waits by the dark woodside,  
For maidenhood.

And the little eyes peer, and peer, and peer ;  
And a word is said.  
And some house knows, for many a year,  
But years of dread.

## VENUS IN ARDEN

**N**OW LOVE, her mantle thrown,  
Goes naked by,  
Threading the woods alone,  
Her royal eye

Happy because the primroses again  
Break on the winter continence of men.

I saw her pass to-day  
In Warwickshire,  
With the old imperial way,  
The old desire,

Fresh as among those other flowers they went,  
More beautiful for Adon's discontent.

Those other years she made  
Her festival  
When the blue eggs were laid  
And lambs were tall,  
By the Athenian rivers while the reeds  
Made love melodious for the Ganymedes.

And now through Cantlow brakes,  
By Wilmcote hill,  
To Avon-side, she makes  
Her garlands still,  
And I who watch her flashing limbs am one  
With youth whose days three thousand years are done.

## COTSWOLD LOVE

**B**LUE SKIES are over Cotswold  
And April snows go by,  
The lasses turn their ribbons  
For April's in the sky,  
And April is the season  
When Sabbath girls are dressed,  
From Rodboro' to Campden,  
In all their silken best.

An ankle is a marvel  
When first the buds are brown,  
And not a lass but knows it  
From Stow to Gloucester town.  
And not a girl goes walking  
Along the Cotswold lanes  
But knows men's eyes in April  
Are quicker than their brains.

It's little that it matters,  
So long as you're alive,  
If you're eighteen in April,  
Or rising sixty-five,  
When April comes to Amberley  
With skies of April blue,  
And Cotswold girls are bridging  
With slyly tilted shoe.

## THE MIDLANDS

**B**LACK in the summer night my Cotswold hill  
Aslant my window sleeps, beneath a sky  
Deep as the bedded violets that fill  
March woods with dusky passion. As I lie  
Abed between cool walls I watch the host  
Of the slow stars lit over Gloucester plain,  
And drowsily the habit of these most  
Beloved of English lands moves in my brain,  
While silence holds dominion of the dark,  
Save when the foxes from the spinneys bark.

I see the valleys in their morning mist  
Wreathed under limpid hills in moving light,  
Happy with many a yeoman melodist :  
I see the little roads of twinkling white  
Busy with fieldward teams and market gear  
Of rosy men, cloth-gaitered, who can tell  
The many-minded changes of the year,  
Who know why crops and kine fare ill or well ;  
I see the sun persuade the mist away,  
Till town and stead are shining to the day.

I see the wagons move along the rows  
Of ripe and summer-breathing clover-flower,  
I see the lissom husbandman who knows  
Deep in his heart the beauty of his power,  
As, lithely pitched, the full-heaped fork bids on  
The harvest home. I hear the rickyard fill

With gossip as in generations gone,  
While wagon follows wagon from the hill.  
I think how, when our seasons all are sealed,  
Shall come the unchanging harvest from the field.

I see the barns and comely manors planned  
By men who somehow moved in comely thought,  
Who, with a simple shippon to their hand,  
As men upon some godlike business wrought ;  
I see the little cottages that keep  
Their beauty still where since Plantaganet  
Have come the shepherds happily to sleep,  
Finding the loaves and cups of cider set ;  
I see the twisted shepherds, brown and old,  
Driving at dusk their glimmering sheep to fold.

And now the valleys that upon the sun  
Broke from their opal veils, are veiled again,  
And the last light upon the wolds is done,  
And silence falls on flocks and fields and men ;  
And black upon the night I watch my hill,  
And the stars shine, and there an owly wing  
Brushes the night, and all again is still,  
And, from this land of worship that I sing,  
I turn to sleep, content that from my sires  
I draw the blood of England's midmost shires.

## MAY GARDEN

**A** SHOWER of green gems on my apple tree  
This first morning of May  
Has fallen out of the night, to be  
Herald of holiday—

Bright gems of green that, fallen there,  
Seem fixed and glowing on the air.

Until a flutter of blackbird wings  
Shakes and makes the boughs alive,  
And the gems are now no frozen things,  
But apple-green buds to thrive  
On sap of my May garden, how well  
The green September globes will tell.

Also my pear tree has its buds,  
But they are silver yellow,  
Like autumn meadows when the floods  
Are silver under willow,  
And here shall long and shapely pears  
Be gathered while the autumn wears.

And there are sixty daffodils  
Beneath my wall. . . .  
And jealousy it is that kills  
This world when all  
The spring's behaviour here is spent  
To make the world magnificent.

## PLOUGH

**T**HE SNOWS are come in early state,  
And love shall now go desolate  
If we should keep too close a gate.

Over the woods a splendour falls  
Of death, and grey are the Gloucester walls,  
And grey the skies for burials.

But secret in the falling snow  
I see the patient ploughman go,  
And watch the quiet furrows grow.

## POLITICS

YOU SAY a thousand things,  
Persuasively,  
And with strange passion hotly I agree,  
And praise your zest,  
And then  
A blackbird sings  
On April lilac, or fieldfaring men,  
Ghostlike, with loaded wain,  
Come down the twilit lane  
To rest,  
And what is all your argument to me?

Oh yes—I know, I know,  
It must be so—  
You must devise  
Your myriad policies,  
For we are little wise,  
And must be led and marshalled, lest we keep  
Too fast a sleep  
Far from the central world's realities.  
Yes, we must heed—  
For surely you reveal  
Life's very heart; surely with flaming zeal  
You search our folly and our secret need;  
And surely it is wrong  
To count my blackbird's song,  
My cones of lilac, and my wagon team,  
More than a world of dream.

But still  
A voice calls from the hill—  
I must away—  
I cannot hear your argument to-day.

O NCE Athens worked and went to see the play,  
And Thomas Atkins kissed the girls of Rome,  
In council in Victoria Square to-day  
Are grey-beard Nazarenes, with shop and home  
And counting-house and all the friendly cares  
That Joseph knew ; in Bull Ring markets meet  
Gossips as once at Babylonian fairs,  
And Helen walks in Corporation Street.

Now Troy is Homer ; and of Nazareth  
Grave histories are of one love that was strong ;  
Athens is beauty ; Rome an immortal death ;  
And Babylon immortal in a song . . . .  
Perplexed as ours these cities were of old ;  
And shall our name greatly as these be told ?

## INSCRIPTION FOR A WAR MEMORIAL FOUNTAIN

**T**HEY nothing feared whose names I celebrate.  
Greater than death they died ; and their estate  
Is here on Cotswold comradely to live  
Upon your lips in every draught I give.

## TREASON

**W**HAT TIME I WRITE my roundelay,  
I am as proud as princes gone,  
Who built their empires in old days,  
As Tamburlaine or Solomon ;  
And wisely though companions then  
Say well it is and well I sing,  
Assured above the praise of men  
I am a solitary king.

But when I leave that straiter mood,  
That lonely hour, and put aside  
The continence of solitude,  
I fall in treason to my pride,  
And if a witling's word be spent  
Upon my song in jealousy,  
In anger and in argument  
I am as derelict as he.

## MY ESTATE

I HAVE FOUR LOVES, four loves are mine,  
My wife who makes all beauty be,  
Tom Squire and Master Candleshine,  
And then my grey dog Timothy.

My wife makes bramble-berry pies,  
And she is bright as bramble dew,  
She knows the way the weather flies,  
And tells me every thing to do.

Tom Squire he is my neighbour man,  
His apples fall upon my grass,  
And in the morning, when we can,  
We say good-morning as we pass.

And Master Candleshine the True,  
Considering some fault of mine,  
Says—"Had it been for me to do,  
It had been hard for Candleshine."

When I have thought all things that be,  
And drop the latch and climb the stair,  
And want an eye for company,  
My grey dog Timothy is there.

My loves are one and two and three  
And four they are, good loves of mine,  
Tom Squire, my grey dog Timothy,  
My wife and Master Candleshine.

## WITH DAFFODILS

**I** SEND YOU DAFFODILS, my dear,  
For these are emperors of spring,  
And in my heart you keep so clear  
So delicate an empery,  
That none but emperors could be  
Ambassadors endowed to bring  
My messages of honesty.

My mind makes faring to and fro,  
Deft or bewildered, dark or kind,  
That not the eye of God may know  
Which motion is of true estate  
And which a twisted runagate  
Of all the farings of my mind,  
And which has honesty for mate.

Only my hope for you is clean  
Of scandal's use, and though, may be,  
Far rangers have my passions been,—  
Since thus the word of Eden went,—  
Yet of the springs of my content,  
My very wells of honesty,  
Are you the only firmament.

## FOR A GUEST ROOM

**A**LL WORDS are said,  
And may it fall  
That, crowning these,  
You here shall find  
A friendly bed,  
A sheltering wall,  
Your body's ease,  
A quiet mind.

May you forget  
In happy sleep  
The world that still  
You hold as friend,  
And may it yet  
Be ours to keep  
Your friendly will  
To the world's end.

For he is blest  
Who, fixed to shun  
All evil, when  
The worst is known,  
Counts, east and west,  
When life is done,  
His debts to men  
In love alone.

## ON READING THE MS. OF DOROTHY WORDSWORTH'S JOURNALS

**T**O-DAY I READ the poet's sister's book,  
She who so comforted those Grasmere days  
When song was at the flood, and thence I took  
A larger note of fortitude and praise.

And in her ancient fastness beauty stirred,  
And happy faith was in my heart again,  
Because the virtue of a simple word  
Was durable above the lives of men.

For reading there that quiet record made  
Of skies and hills, domestic hours, and free  
Traffic of friends, and song, and duty paid,  
I touched the wings of immortality.

## THE OLD WARRIOR

**S**ORROW HAS COME to me,  
Making the world to be  
    Of sunken cheek ;  
Faded my fields, and of  
Names that were most to love,  
    I dare not speak.

Would that my soul were blind,  
Since duty brings to mind  
    All that is done,  
Saying, ‘How gladly you  
Walked with your chosen few  
    Under my sun.’

I am an alien now ;  
Tell me, good stranger, how  
    Best may be borne  
His grief who comes at night  
To his own window-light  
    Friendless, forlorn.

No. I will pass. Again  
Of my delight in men  
    Nothing shall tell.  
Now is my travel where  
My lost companions fare ;  
    Onward. Farewell.

## THE GUEST

SOMETIMES I FEEL that death is very near,  
And, with half-lifted hand,  
Looks in my eyes, and tells me not to fear,  
But walk his friendly land,  
Comrade with him, and wise  
As peace is wise.

Then, greatly though my heart with pity moves  
For dear imperilled loves,  
I somehow know  
That death is friendly so,  
A comfortable spirit ; one who takes  
Long thought for all our sakes.

I wonder ; will he come that friendly way,  
That guest, or roughly in the appointed day ?  
And will, when the last drops of life are spilt,  
My soul be torn from me,  
Or, like a ship truly and trimly built,  
Slip quietly to sea ?

## REVERIE

**H**ERE in the unfrequented noon,  
In the green hermitage of June,  
While overhead a rustling wing  
Minds me of birds that do not sing  
Until the cooler eve rewakes  
The service of melodious brakes,  
And thoughts are lonely rangers, here,  
In shelter of the primrose year,  
I curiously meditate  
Our brief and variable state.

I think how many are alive  
Who better in the grave would thrive,  
If some so long a sleep might give  
Better instruction how to live ;  
I think what splendours had been said  
By darlings now untimely dead  
Had death been wise in choice of these,  
And made exchange of obsequies.

I think what loss to government  
It is that good men are content,  
Well knowing that an evil will  
Is folly-stricken too, and still  
Itself considers only wise  
For all rebukes and surgeries,  
That evil men should raise their pride  
To place and fortune undefied.

I think how daily we beguile  
Our brains, that yet a little while  
And all our congregated schemes  
And our perplexity of dreams,  
Shall come to whole and perfect state.  
I think, however long the date  
Of life may be, at last the sun  
Shall pass upon campaigns undone.

I look upon the world and see  
A world colonial to me,  
Whereof I am the architect,  
And principal and intellect,  
A world whose shape and savour spring  
Out of my lone imagining,  
A world whose nature is subdued  
For ever to my instant mood,  
And only beautiful can be  
Because of beauty is in me.  
And then I know that every mind  
Among the millions of my kind  
Makes earth his own particular  
And privately created star,  
That earth has thus no single state,  
Being every man articulate.  
Till thought has no horizon then  
I try to think how many men  
There are to make an earth apart  
In symbol of the urgent heart,  
For there are forty in my street,

And seven hundred more in Greet,  
And families at Luton Hoo,  
And there are men in China, too.

And what immensity is this  
That is but a parenthesis  
Set in a little human thought,  
Before the body comes to naught.  
There at the bottom of the copse  
I see a field of turnip tops,  
I see the cropping cattle pass  
There in another field, of grass,  
And fields and fields, with seven towns,  
A river, and a flight of downs,  
Steeple for all religious men,  
Ten thousand trees, and orchards ten,  
A mighty span that curves away  
Into blue beauty, and I lay  
All this as quartered on a sphere  
Hung huge in space, a thing of fear  
Vast as the circle of the sky  
Completed to the astonished eye ;  
And then I think that all I see,  
Whereof I frame immensity  
Globed for amazement, is no more  
Than a shire's corner, and that four  
Great shires being ten times multiplied  
Are small on the Atlantic tide  
As an emerald on a silver bowl . . .  
And the Atlantic to the whole

Sweep of this tributary star  
That is our earth is but . . . and far  
Through dreadful space the outmeasured mind  
Seeks to conceive the unconfined.

I think of Time. How, when his wing  
Composes all our quarrelling  
In some green corner where May leaves  
Are loud with blackbirds on all eves,  
And all the dust that was our bones  
Is underneath memorial stones,  
Then shall old jealousies, while we  
Lie side by side most quietly,  
Be but oblivion's fools, and still  
When curious pilgrims ask—‘What skill  
Had these that from oblivion saves?’—  
My song shall sing above our graves.

I think how men of gentle mind,  
And friendly will, and honest kind,  
Deny their nature and appear  
Fellows of jealousy and fear ;  
Having single faith, and natural wit  
To measure truth and cherish it,  
Yet, strangely, when they build in thought,  
Twisting the honesty that wrought  
In the straight motion of the heart,  
Into its feigning counterpart  
That is the brain’s betrayal of  
The simple purposes of love ;

And what yet sorrier decline  
Is theirs when, eager to confine  
No more within the silent brain  
Its habit, thought seeks birth again  
In speech, as honesty has done  
In thought ; then even what had won  
From heart to brain fades and is lost  
In this pretended pentecost,  
This their forlorn captivity  
To speech, who have not learnt to be  
Lords of the word, nor kept among  
The sterner climates of the tongue . . .  
So truth is in their hearts, and then  
Falls to confusion in the brain,  
And, fading through this mid-eclipse,  
It perishes upon the lips.

I think how year by year I still  
Find working in my dauntless will  
Sudden timidities that are  
Merely the echo of some far  
Forgotten tyrannies that came  
To youth's bewilderment and shame ;  
That yet a magisterial gown,  
Being worn by one of no renown  
And half a generation less  
In years than I, can dispossess  
Something my circumspecter mood  
Of excellence and quietude,  
And if a Bishop speaks to me

I tremble with propriety.

I think how strange it is that he  
Who goes most comradely with me  
In beauty's worship, takes delight  
In shows that to my eager sight  
Are shadows and unmanifest,  
While beauty's favour and behest  
To me in motion are revealed  
That is against his vision sealed ;  
Yet is our hearts' necessity  
Not twofold, but a common plea  
That chaos come to continence,  
Whereto the arch-intelligence  
Richly in divers voices makes  
Its answer for our several sakes.

I see the disinherited  
And long procession of the dead,  
Who have in generations gone  
Held fugitive dominion  
Of this same primrose pasturage  
That is my momentary wage.  
I see two lovers move along  
These shadowed silences of song,  
With spring in blossom at their feet  
More incomunicably sweet  
To their hearts' more magnificence,  
Than to the common courts of sense,  
Till joy his tardy closure tells

With coming of the curfew bells.  
I see the knights of spur and sword  
Crossing the little woodland ford,  
Riding in ghostly cavalcade  
On some unchronicled crusade.  
I see the silent hunter go  
In cloth of yeoman green, with bow  
Strung, and a quiver of grey wings.  
I see the little herd who brings  
His cattle homeward, while his sire  
Makes bivouac in Warwickshire  
This night, the liege and loyal man  
Of Cavalier or Puritan.  
And as they pass, the nameless dead,  
Unsung, uncelebrate, and sped  
Upon an unremembered hour  
As any twelvemonth fallen flower,  
I think how strangely yet they live  
For all their days were fugitive.

I think how soon we too shall be  
A story with our ancestry.

I think what miracle has been  
That you whose love among this green  
Delightful solitude is still  
The stay and substance of my will,  
The dear custodian of my song,  
My thrifty counsellor and strong,  
Should take the time of all time's tide

That was my season, to abide  
On earth also ; that we should be  
Charted across eternity  
To one elect and happy day  
Of yellow primroses in May.

The clock is calling five o'clock,  
And Nonesopretty brings her flock  
To fold, and Tom comes back from town  
With hose and ribbons worth a crown,  
And duly at The Old King's Head  
They gather now to daily bread,  
And I no more may meditate  
Our brief and variable state.

## PENANCES

**T**HESE are my happy penances. To make  
Beauty without a covenant ; to take  
Measure of time only because I know  
That in death's market-place I still shall owe  
Service to beauty that shall not be done ;  
To know that beauty's doctrine is begun  
And makes a close in sacrifice ; to find  
In beauty's courts the unappeasable mind.

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